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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how elementary teachers used one particular form of planning time available to them. Interviews with and observations of 30 teachers from 6 suburban elementary schools examined their use of a 30-minute planning period. The interviews and observations produced 24 activities which were listed on a questionnaire and circulated to teachers and parents. The teachers and parents ranked the items based on their perceptions of frequency of engagement. These teacher and parent rankings were then correlated for the two groups and with the frequency and duration of teacher task performance observed during the planning time. The differences in the correlation of teacher and parent perceptions, when coupled with the variability in parent rankings, suggest that parents lacked understanding of planning time available to teachers and how it was actually used. Teachers used their time in discretionary and flexible ways. Very little of the time was devoted to tasks that would enhance instructional delivery. (Contains 17 references.) (SM)

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Running head: ELEMENTARY TEACHER PLANNING TIME

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Elementary Teacher Planning Time:
Teacher Use; Parent Perception

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Abstract

This study employed interviews and observations of 30 teachers from 6 elementary schools to examine use of a 30-minute planning period. The interviews and 120 observations produced 24 activities listed on a questionnaire circulated to teachers and parents who ranked the items based upon their perception of frequency of engagement. The rankings assigned by teachers and parents then were correlated for the two groups and with the frequency and duration of teacher task performance observed in this planning time.

Differences in the correlation of teacher and parent perceptions, when coupled with the variability in parent rankings, suggest a lack of parent understanding of use of this time. Very little of this time was devoted to tasks enhancing instructional delivery.

Elementary Teacher Planning Time: Teacher Use; Parent Perception

In this study, we sought to determine how elementary teachers use one particular form of the planning time available to them and to determine the congruence between the use of that time, teachers' perception of the use of that time, and parent perception of teachers' use of that time. We hypothesized that observed teacher use of the time would be (a) strongly related to teacher responses to a survey on their use of planning time and (b) weakly related to parent responses on the same survey regarding teacher use. We also hypothesized that the relationship between teacher perceptions and parent perceptions, as revealed by the survey, would be weak. This examination would provide us with insight regarding an important element of the teacher's work environment--planning time. We were specifically interested in how teachers use the thirty-or-so minute planning time available to many teachers in the United States during their contract day. Our premise was that knowledge of teacher use of this time, coupled with parent perception of that use, would clarify understanding of the time aspect of the teacher's work environment that may need modification for accomplishing school reform.

In recent years, increased attention has been given to the interactions between teachers and the environment in which they teach (Feldman, 1994; Liston & Zeichner, 1991; O'Loughlin, 1989; Tobin & McRobbie, 1996). This attention stems from the belief that working conditions for teachers and students' learning conditions are inextricably intertwined. Louis and Smith (1990) have noted that it is impossible to change learning conditions for students if we do not change the working conditions for teachers. Fullan and Miles (1992), Hannaway and Carnoy (1993), and Johansen (1992) have remarked on the importance of time in school reform. Sarason (1990) has suggested that most school reforms fail largely because of time. In his theoretical analysis of time and an elementary teacher's work, Hargreaves (1990) identified five interrelated dimensions of time: technical-rational time, micropolitical time, phenomenological time, physical time, and sociopolitical time. It is this latter category that is central to the administrative control of teachers' work and the implementation of curriculum. To Hargreaves, it is in this dimension that originate the pressures, expectations and controls concerning what teachers do and how much they do in a day. After analyzing teacher interviews, Hargreaves noted the importance to teachers of discretion and flexibility in the use of preparation time and its integration with the rest of their work outside the classroom. Campbell (1985) also created a classification of the different forms of time engaging teachers. Among those categories is preparation time--the brief scheduled time teachers have away from their classes to attend to important duties that arise during the day. Campbell distinguishes as personal time the time designated for individual reading, researching, planning, and attendance of courses.

If it is important to note the distinction in these types of time for an elementary teacher, it is also important to acknowledge what others have found about teachers' time: there are steadily increasing claims on teachers' time, claims attributable to societal changes and demands for educational reform (Bruno, 1997; Day, 1997; McLaughlin & Oberman, 1996; Nelson, 1995). Teachers find that time is a major constraint on what they are able and expected to achieve in their schools and classrooms. "No time, not enough time, and need for more time" are the gauntlets they throw before innovators

(Hargreaves, 1990). However, when teachers have opportunities to organize and control their work environments, their performance improves (Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988). It seems, then, that if the time component of teachers' work environments are better understood, we can better grasp the policy and resource requirements for school improvement.

There are multiple perceptions that impact our understanding of teachers' work environments. Those perceptions may originate with teachers, with researchers, or with the general public. If time is an important part of the teachers' work environment, and an important element of school reform, then how do teachers, researchers, and parents perceive teacher use of time? Further, is there agreement among those perceptions? Do the teacher perceptions of their use of planning time differ from their actual use of planning time? For example, if researchers depend upon surveys of teachers to determine how teachers use their time, it is important to know the degree to which teacher questionnaire responses relate to actual teacher practice. Further, there is the public perception of the teaching profession that impacts our understanding of teachers' work environments. Since nearly everyone has spent some time in the teaching-learning process, each of us has developed our impressions of the profession—impressions that may not be consistent with either the statistical or individual teacher descriptors of the profession (Adelman, 1998). To what extent are these perceptions, relative to teacher planning time, consistent with teacher perceptions and teacher practice? If they are incongruent, that incongruence will only contribute to the difficulties teachers face as they play their roles in school reform.

We do know that one of the principal methods for obtaining on-the-clock planning time for regular classroom teachers in the United States is by assigning students to specialist teachers (e.g., art, music, and physical education). This strategy yields an almost daily period without students for the regular classroom teacher to use for such routine chores as copying, making phone calls, and grading papers (Adelman, 1998). It is an analysis of this form of planning time--Campbell's "preparation time" and Hargreaves "sociopolitical time"--that was the focus of this study. We examined this through interviews with teachers, shadowing of teachers during this planning time, and analysis of teacher and parent responses to a survey of their perceptions of the use of this time. We sought to document what elementary teachers actually do in this planning time and how that fits with parental perception of planning time use.

Methodology

Subjects and Sampling

For this study, we randomly selected six elementary schools from the 133 elementary schools in a large mid-Atlantic suburban school district. A letter was sent to the principal of each school requesting permission for access to the school and for interviewing and observing five teachers from that site. We also asked permission to distribute a questionnaire to one parent from each teacher's classroom. Only one school picked in the initial random selection declined to participate. It was replaced with another randomly selected school. For each school, from the teachers at each grade level, grades one through five, we then randomly selected one teacher. This assured us there would be

thirty teachers--a teacher from each grade level at each school. From each of those thirty classrooms we then randomly selected a parent, giving us a total of thirty parents.

The thirty teachers in this sample ranged in age from 23 to 58 years, with a mean of 41. There were 27 females and three males. Fifteen of the teachers held master's degrees; 15, the bachelor's. Their experience ranged from two to 34 years, with a mean of 15. The number of students in each teacher's classroom ranged from 20 to 27, with a mean of 24 and a mode of 27.

Instruments

In this study, we used teacher interview protocols, a checklist for observing teachers, and a questionnaire used to survey teachers and parents.

In a pilot phase conducted before this study was initiated, we developed the teacher observation forms. Subsequently, we piloted the observation form by shadowing a sample of teachers during their planning time. From those observations, we were able to develop interview protocols, teacher observation checklists, and the questionnaires to be circulated to teachers and parents during the actual study.

The teacher interview guide focused on retrieving background information on the teacher's teaching experience, attitudes and feelings toward instructional planning time, and aspects of the time available for planning, how much time teachers used, and how they actually did the planning. The guide employed both open- and close-ended questions. In the course of the study, we interviewed teachers for 45 to 60 minutes, taking handwritten notes and tape recording the interviews.

The preliminary observation procedures led to the creation of twenty-three categories of teacher behavior that occurred during the thirty minute planning period. A twenty-fourth category--"Other"--was added to capture activity not included in the twenty-three. The twenty-four categories became the categories respondents were asked to rank using the questionnaires. The resultant questionnaire form subsequently was piloted with a sample of teachers and parents different from those included in the study.

The observation checklist consisted of the same twenty-four categories used on the teacher and parent questionnaires. It also included columns where the observer could record for activity occurrence (a) the frequency, (b) the duration (in minutes and seconds) and (c) comments. It, too, was piloted in a phase prior to the primary study. Table 1 provides a partial display of the checklist.

Insert Table 1 about here

The questionnaires circulated to teachers and parents listed the twenty-four categories (as revealed in the pilot phase of this study) that usually engage teachers in their thirty minute planning time. The instructions on the questionnaire included the following:

Listed below are categories of activities that elementary teachers usually engage in during their scheduled instructional planning periods.

A teacher's scheduled instructional planning period is defined as -the period of time during the day set aside for planning purposes. This period of time usually lasts between 30 and 60 minutes and is scheduled during the teacher's contract

school time. This scheduled instructional planning period is a time that the teacher is without the responsibility of direct instruction and interaction with students.

Please rank order the list (1,2,3, etc.) where 1 is the most frequent type of activity, 2 the second most frequent, 3 the third most frequent, etc. ...of what you believe an elementary teacher most frequently to least frequently engages in during this scheduled instructional time period.

Therefore, giving a category/component a 1 would mean they engage in this activity very frequently. Giving a category/component a 24 would mean they practically never engage in this activity.

You are to rank every category/component with an assigned number without assigning the same number to more than one category/component. In other words, when you have finished every category will have a number and you will have used every number from 1 to 24.

Suggestion: Read and look at ALL the categories first. Then separate into two distinct categories--those activities that you feel the teacher would engage in most of the time and those activities that you feel the teacher would hardly ever engage in. Work your way numbering in the "most" group from 1-12 and then in the "least" group from 24-13. This way you're covering the most and the least activities and then working your way to the middle.

Procedures

We wished to determine (a) how teachers believe they use this particular form of planning time, (b) how teachers actually use that time, (c) parent perceptions of how that time is used, and (d) the relationships between teacher belief, teacher use, and parent perception. To acquire data on these issues, we employed interviews of teachers, the shadowing of teachers during their planning time, and the distribution of questionnaires to parents and teachers.

There were two phases to the study procedures: that in which we collected data on and from teachers and that in which we circulated questionnaires to teachers and parents.

During the six months of the study, each of the thirty teachers was interviewed once. At each interview, written notes were made of teacher responses to questions. The interviews also were tape-recorded. Subsequent transcription, coding, and analysis (including analysis using NVivo software) produced teacher views on when they plan, how they plan, with whom they plan, the factors affecting their planning time, and the actual tasks which engage them during this thirty minute planning time.

After the interviews were completed, each teacher was observed during their thirty minute planning time on four different occasions. We used the observation checklist described above for recording teacher activity--frequency and duration.

We circulated the questionnaires to the thirty teachers and parents. As noted above, we asked the respondents to rank the twenty-four activities in terms of frequency of occurrence.

Subsequently, we determined average rankings for each category on the questionnaire and on the observation sheets for (a) the teacher group and (b) the parent group. We ran Spearman's rho correlations for the average rankings awarded by teachers with the average rankings awarded by parents for (a) the questionnaires, (b) the frequency of teacher engagement (from the observation of teachers), and (c) the duration of teacher engagement (also from the observation of teachers).

The use of average rankings hides the variability in rankings awarded by either group on the questionnaire. We addressed variability by comparing the mean rank on each of the twenty-four items for the two groups (teachers and parents). We reported the percent of each sample awarding a rank deviating from the mean ranking by two or more ranks. We then identified the questionnaire items where those percentages differed by five or more percentage points.

Results

From the data collection, we have (a) the tasks engaged in by elementary teachers as reported in the interviews; (b) the mean ranks awarded by teachers and parents for the twenty-four items on the questionnaire; (c) the frequencies of tasks engaged in by teachers, as tallied during the observations; and (d) the total time of task engagement, as recorded during the observations. Initially, the category "Other" was used as a category for the tallies (c) and (d). After that initial analysis of the observation data, "Other" was subdivided into ten additional categories. They were: waiting; personal calls or personal errands; late departure from the classroom; preparing assignments for students to take home dealing with a cancelled fieldtrip; fixing equipment; attending an assembly; relaxing; exiting for a fire drill; and engaging in casual conversation. These activities were not observed in the shadowings of the pilot phase of the study. Therefore, we did not include them on the teacher and parent questionnaires.

In the interviews, teachers reported the use of this planning time as indicated in Table 2. The tasks reported most frequently were (1) traveling to destinations in the building; (2) checking messages; (3) taking bathroom breaks; (4) photocopying; and (5) preparation of materials.

Insert Table 2 about here.

The observations of how teachers actually used this thirty-minute planning time were summarized according to the frequency of the observed tasks (Table 3) and the total time of the task engagement (Table 4). (Entries in both tables are for totals of the 60 hours of observations.) In terms of frequency, the most frequently observed tasks were (1) traveling; (2) interactions with other teachers; (3) checking messages; and (4) interacting with staff and specialists. In terms of total time, the tasks engaging teachers for the longest time periods were (1) traveling; (2) grading papers; (3) preparing materials; and (4) interacting with parents.

Insert Table 3 about here.

Insert Table 4 about here.

For the twenty-four item questionnaire, the Spearman rho correlation of the mean rankings of teachers with those of parents was .616 ($p = .01$). When questionnaire

rankings were compared with the observed frequency of tasks, using the original twenty-four categories, the correlations were .448 ($p = .05$) and -.052 (not significant) for teachers and parents, respectively. Correlations of questionnaire rankings with total time of task rankings (again, using the original twenty-four categories) were .263 and .001, respectively, for teachers and parents. Neither was significantly different from zero.

Insert Table 5 about here.

We also examined the variability in the rankings of the twenty-four questionnaire categories assigned by teachers and parents (Table 5). For example, of the twenty-four items, item 2, "professional development," had a mean rank of 21 from teachers and 16.66 from parents. Thirteen percent of teachers assigned to this category a rank deviating from 21 by two or more ranks while 73 percent of the parents assigned a rank deviating from 16.66 by two or more ranks. Thus, parents varied more in the ranks they assigned "professional development" than did teachers. When we use a criterion of a difference of five or more percentage points, the percentage of parents deviating from their mean rank exceeded the percentage of teachers so deviating from their mean on eleven of the twenty-four items (items 1,2,7,9,11,14,15,16,19,20, and 22).

Discussion

This study is revealing about this thirty-minute planning time and the methods that were used to gather information about its use. It also documents how this particular time component of the teacher's work environment is used. It sheds light on how teachers' perception of that use correlates with their actual use of this form of planning time and how the use and teacher perception differ relative to the perceptions of a sample of parents.

1. A very small proportion of this time is actually devoted to the tasks that enhance the form of teacher delivery of instruction. This prompts three cautions. First, this form of planning time, while useful for managing many of the tasks related to teaching, likely is not significant in contributing directly to changes in instruction. Second, knowledge of teacher use of this time does indicate the importance of examining how teachers use other forms of planning time to impact their instruction, including implementing aspects of school reform and professional accountability. Finally, calling it "planning time" may contribute to misunderstandings about the time available to teachers for instructional planning. However, the fact that this time is not spent literally in "planning" should not diminish the importance of this time to teachers in managing the day-to-day tasks that confront them. This time is obviously important in supervising the movement of pupils, grading papers, preparing materials, and in interacting with parents and other staff members--a few among the many administrative tasks that daily confront teachers.
2. Comparison of questionnaire results revealed a moderate correlation ($\rho = .616$) between teacher and parent ranking of planning time uses. However, the correlation of teacher questionnaire rankings with the actual observed frequency of task performance was a significant .448 while that for parents with task frequency was -.052. Further, questionnaire correlations with the total time spent on tasks were .263 and .001 (and not significantly different from zero) for teachers and parents, respectively. These

differences, when coupled with the variability in parent rankings, suggest a lack of parent understanding of the planning time available to teachers and the manner in which it is actually used. Justifying or acquiring planning time for teachers should be accompanied by the education of parents (and others) regarding the limitations of what is now available to teachers.

3. After completing the questionnaires, teachers remarked, "I wish you had done the questionnaire before the interview! I left out a lot!" Those remarks coupled with the differences for frequency and total time, point out the importance of using multiple forms of information gathering.

In terms of aspects of the theory about the time component of a teacher's environment, we found quantitative evidence that teachers do, as Hargreaves (1990) claims from interview data, use this "preparation time" in discretionary and flexible ways. Our study also adds to the quantitative confirmation of Campbell's (1985) distinction between preparation time and personal time. Campbell places "planning" in the personal category and the tasks we observed in the preparation category.

We obtained these findings on a limited sample of teachers and parents in a single, large, affluent suburban school district. We examined only a particular form of "planning time." Without question, similar work should be done in other settings and on other forms of planning time. Still, we firmly believe that this study reveals how little planning time is available to teachers. It substantiates the point of Louis and Smith (1990) that it is impossible to change learning conditions for students if we do not change working conditions for teachers.

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Table 1

Partial Teacher Observation Checklist

Component/Task	Frequency	Total	Duration (Unit: Min/Sec)	Total	Comments
Basic Needs (A fundamental requirement for survival. These needs include: bathroom breaks, eating, and drinking)					
Professional Development (Attending seminars, workshops, conferences and classes that enhance teacher knowledge and skills)					
Administrative Duties (Filling out paperwork required by school or district, engaging in committee work - e.g., SCA officer, bus duty, hall duty, Lead Teacher, etc.)					
Designing the Classroom (Altering the physical layout of the classroom - e.g., moving desks, organizing books, etc.)					

Table 2.

Reported Tasks Engaged in by Elementary Teachers During a 30-Minute Instructional Planning Period

Number of Teachers Responded	Task
29	Traveling--walking to various destinations in the school building
25	Checking messages
22	Basic needs--bathroom break
20	Photocopy
19	Preparation of materials
17	Teacher interactions with parents (phone calls, notes, and face-to-face meetings)
12	Teacher interactions with staff and specialists
9	Teacher interactions with other teachers
6	Teacher interactions with administrators
5	Grading papers
4	Administrative duties
4	Looking over lesson plans for the day and/or next lesson (individual planning)
3	Creating a worksheet
3	Other--personal phone calls and relaxing
1	Organizing--designing the classroom
1	Student record keeping
1	Teacher interactions with students

Note: There were a possible 30 teachers for each item.

Table 3.

The Frequency of Observed Tasks During Elementary Teachers' 30-Minute Instructional Planning Periods

Frequency of Task Observed	Task
403	Traveling (walking to various destinations in the school building)
102	Teacher interactions with other teachers
95	Checking messages
86	Teacher interactions with staff and specialists
52	Basic needs – bathroom break
51	Preparation of materials
49	Teacher interactions with parents
33	Photocopying
31	Waiting
29	Student record keeping
26	Teacher interactions with students
24	Administrative duties
22	Grading papers
21	Designing the classroom
18	Personal calls/Personal errands
16	Late leaving classroom
14	Teacher interactions with community members
12	Preparing assignments for students to take home
11	Bulletin board displays
11	Using print resources
11	Individual planning
9	Teacher interactions with administrators
8	Team planning
4	Creating worksheets
4	Professional development
3	Field trip/cancelled
2	Fixing equipment
2	Attending assemblies
2	Scheduling programs
2	Relaxing
1	Fire drill
1	Creating learning centers
1	Casual conversations

Table 4.

The Total Time of Tasks Observed During Elementary Teachers' 30-Minute Instructional Planning Periods

Time Spent in Minutes (Out of 3,600 min.)	Task
531	Traveling (walking to various destinations in the school building)
257	Grading papers
251	Preparation of materials
239	Teacher interactions with parents
217	Teacher interactions with other teachers
199	Student record keeping
197	Teacher interactions with staff and specialists
168	Checking messages
150	Professional development
145	Photocopying
108	Administrative duties
107	Teacher interactions with students
97	Team planning
90	Field trip/cancelled
84	Preparing assignments for students to take home
81 (80:50)	Basic needs – bathroom break
81 (80:48)	Designing the classroom
72	Personal calls/Personal errands
71	Teacher interactions with community members
69	Individual planning
65	Waiting
63	Bulletin board displays
56	Using print resources
52	Teacher interactions with administrators
49	Late leaving classroom
28	Creating worksheets
24	Attending assemblies
17	Scheduling programs
13	Fixing equipment
11	Creating learning centers
6	Fire drill
1	Relaxing
1	Casual conversations

Table 5.

Mean Rank of Teachers' and Parents' Perceptions of the Tasks Engaged in by
Elementary Teachers During a 30-Minute Planning Period and the Percent of Variability
of the Ranks in Each Group

Item	Mean Rank		Percent Deviating by Two or More Ranks	
	Teachers	Parents	Teachers	Parents
1. Basic Needs	4.16	10.3	80	90
2. Prof. Development	21	16.66	13	73
3. Admin. Duties	10.2	12.13	77	77
4. Design Class	16.1	14.63	80	77
5. Bulletin Board	15.56	13.36	83	63
6. Create Centers	17.33	12.9	73	77
7. Prep. Materials	4.53	7.56	53	60
8. Print Resources	10.2	10.73	80	83
9. Photocopy	4.46	10.7	57	83
10. Individual Plan	10.4	5.63	90	70
11. Team Planning	13.23	8.3	73	90
12. Grade Papers	11.9	6.1	77	80
13. Student Records	11.76	8.6	67	67
14. Int. w/ Parents	8.66	12.63	63	70
15. Int. w/ Students	18.06	14.5	60	70
16. Int. w/ Admin.	12.86	12.5	60	83
17. Int. w/ Staff	12.43	12.86	80	70
18. Int. w/ Teachers	12.2	12.83	83	63
19. Int. w/ Community	21.2	20.56	23	57
20. Schedule Program	17.1	14.8	53	87
21. Worksheets	10.43	8.73	64	64
22. Check Messages	7.2	10.8	67	80
23. Travel	7.06	19.4	67	64
24. Other	22.56	22.93	13	7
Average			64	71

Note. Highlighted numbers display the group with the lower percent of respondents deviating from the mean rank by two or more ranks for that specific task item. A percent is highlighted if it differs from the other by more than five percentage points.



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